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For Immediate Release

Kentucky Court of Justice creates truancy diversion program — Johnson and Lawrence counties to be pilot sites —

FRANKFORT, Ky., Dec. 19, 2005 — The Kentucky Court of Justice has announced the creation of a Truancy Diversion Program for students at risk of being charged with a truancy offense and referred to district court or family court. The Truancy Diversion Program will eventually be available statewide, but schools in Johnson and Lawrence counties are ready to begin this important program for Kentucky's youth.

Students who have missed the number of days allotted to them for a specific school period or who have too many unexcused absences are subject to being charged with a truancy offense and the creation of a formal court record for the offender. Truancy is a status offense, which means it is an act that would not be criminal if committed by an adult.

"The negative and long range consequences of truancy are not always understood by the young person charged with persistent absences," stated Family Court Judge John David Preston, who will assist with overseeing the Truancy Diversion Program in Johnson and Lawrence county schools. "This program brings together educators, law enforcement agencies, courts, communities and families to help young people break out of this downward cycle by offering support and positive solutions instead court sentences."

The Truancy Diversion Program uses a team approach to help students develop good attendance habits and improve their overall school experience. The truancy diversion team is made up of judges, court designated workers, school counselors, principals, directors of Pupil Personnel, and Family Resource staff.

The Court Designated Worker Program, under the direction of Administrative Office of the Courts, Department of Juvenile Services, will facilitate the Truancy Diversion Program. Court designated workers will hold weekly meetings, with both parent and student present, to review his or her attendance record, behavior and grades, and to

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develop a plan for success. Judges will periodically attend meetings to reinforce the work of the truancy diversion team and to offer encouragement and recognition to participating students for progress made.

The Court Designated Worker Program was created in 1986 by legislation enacted by the Kentucky General Assembly, which provided for each of the state's 120 counties to have the services of a court designated worker. Court designated workers are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to process complaints against individuals under the age of 18. The purpose of the CDW Program is to serve the best interests of the child and to provide redress for offenses without court action and without the creation of a formal court record.

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